

Testimony of Andrei Illarionov
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before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs
at the hearing “From Competition to Collaboration:
Strengthening the U.S.-Russia Relationship”,
February 25, 2009.

Chairman Berman, Ranking member Ros-Lehtinen, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share with you my views on the current status of the U.S.-Russia relationship and on possible consequences of its strengthening in near future.

Disclaimer

First of all, I would like to provide you with a necessary disclaimer.

- I am a Russian citizen.
- For number of years I worked at different posts at the Russian government and the Administration of the Russian President.
- Since my resignation from the positions of the Russian President's Personal Representative to the G-8 (Sherpa) and Adviser to the Russian President in 2005 I was not employed by any Government and did not receive any payment from neither Russian Government, nor the US Government, nor any other Government.
- For last two and half years I do work for the Cato Institute here in Washington that is a non-partisan think tank not associated with any of political parties existed in the US or in any other country in the world. According to its Charter the Cato Institute does not accept financial support from any government, government agency or government-related program.
- As a Russian citizen and a Cato Institute employee I am not in a position to advice either the US Government, or esteemed members of the US Congress. Whatever I will say here today, should be considered as background information that you are welcome to use as you find it suitable.
- Whatever I will say here, should be considered as solely my personal views on what I see as the best interests of the Russian people on a way one day to create and develop Russia as a democratic, open, peaceful and prosperous country, respected and respectable member of the international community, reliable partner of other democratic countries, including the United States. I solely bear responsibility for everything that I say here today.

In my testimony I touch upon three issues:

- challenges from the past of the U.S.-Russia relationship;
- challenges to the Russian people, neighboring countries, and world peace from the current political regime in Russia;
- forecast of what could happen if the approach that is been announced and taken by the current administration will be fulfilled.

Challenges from the past of the U.S.-Russia relationship

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent Russia two US Administrations, namely that of the President Bill Clinton and that of the President George W. Bush, began their terms with clear formulated goal – to improve the US-Russia cooperation. Each of the administrations started their terms with great expectations for fruitful bilateral relations. Regardless of their individual approaches, personal attitudes, content of issues at the agenda, both US administrations have invested heavily in terms of time, efforts, attention of their key members, including both Presidents, into improvement of the U.S.-Russia relations. Both administrations have created special bodies for development of these relations (the so called Gore-Chernomyrdin commission by the Clinton administration and bilateral Group of High level by the Bush administrations). Many delegations have crossed the ocean, many hours have been spent in the conversations, many decisions have been taken.

The outcomes of these efforts are well known. They were outright failures. Russia has failed to be integrated fully into the community of the modern democratic peaceful nations. Each US administration has finished its term in the office with the U.S.-Russian relations at much lower level than they were at its beginning. The leading feeling at the end of each Administration's term is widely shared disappointment – both among members of the administrations and in the Russian and the US societies.

The beginning of the President Obama Administration's term strikingly resembles the beginning of the two preceding administrations' terms. We can see similar desire to improve bilateral relations, similar positive statements, similar promising gestures and visits. Since nothing serious has changed in the nature of political regimes in both countries it is rather hard not to expect the repetition of already known pattern – high expectations – deep disappointments – heavy failures – for the third time.

That is why before any new policy is being implemented and even being formulated it is worth to spend some time to analyze the reasons of two previous failures. To my mind, they arise mainly from the nature of the current Russian political regime, lack of understanding on the part of the US the internal logic and intentions of the current Russian leadership, inability of the democratic nations to deal with the challenges of the powerful authoritarian regimes, and a double standards approach in the US policies towards similar issues on the international arena.

Nature of the current political regime in Russia

Today's Russia is not a democratic country. The international human rights organization Freedom House assigns “Not Free” status to Russia since 2004 for each of the last 5 years. According to the classification of the political regimes, the current one in Russia should be considered as hard authoritarianism. The central place in the Russian political system is occupied by the Corporation of the secret police.

The Corporation of Secret Police.

The personnel of Federal Security Service – both in active service as well as retired one¹ – form a special type of unity (non-necessarily institutionalized) that can be called *brotherhood*, *order*, or *corporation*. The Corporation of the secret police operatives (CSP) includes first of all acting and former officers of the FSB² (former KGB), and to a lesser extent FSO³ and Prosecutor General Office. Officers of GRU⁴ and SVR⁵ do also play some role. The members of the Corporation do share strong allegiance to their respective organizations, strict codes of conduct and of honor, basic principles of behavior, including among others the principle of mutual support to each other in any circumstances and the principle of *omerta*. Since the Corporation preserves traditions, hierarchies, codes and habits of secret police and intelligence services, its members show high degree of obedience to the current leadership, strong loyalty to each other, rather strict discipline. There are both formal and informal means of enforcing these norms. Violators of the code of conduct are subject to the harshest forms of punishment, including the highest form⁶.

CSP and the Russian society.

Members of the CSP are specially trained, strongly motivated and mentally oriented to use force against other people and in this regard differ substantially from civilians. The important distinction of enforcement in today's Russia from enforcement in rule-based nations is that in the former case it doesn't necessarily imply enforcement of Law. It means solely enforcement of Power and Force regardless of Law, quite often against Law. Members of the Corporation are trained and inspired with *the superiority complex* over the rest of the population. Members of the Corporation exude a sense of being the *bosses* that superior to other people who are not members of the CSP. They are equipped with membership *perks*, including two most tangible instruments conferring real power over the rest of population in today's Russia – the FSB IDs⁷ and the right to carry and use weapons.

Capture of state power by the CSP.

Since ascension of Vladimir Putin to power the members of the CSP have infiltrated all branches of power in Russia. According to the Olga Kryshchanovskaya's study⁸ up to 77% of the 1016 top government positions have been taken by people with security background (26% with openly stated affiliation to different enforcement agencies and other 51% with hidden affiliation)⁹. Main bodies of the Russian state (Presidential Administration, Government apparatus, Tax agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense,

¹ Well known statement of Vladimir Putin claims that "There is no such a person like a retired secret police operative".

² Federal Security Service – *Federalnaja sluzhba bezopasnosti (FSB)*.

³ Federal Guard Service - *Federalnaja sluzhba ohrany (FSO)*.

⁴ Chief Intelligence Office – *Glavnoe razvedyvatelnoe upravlenie (GRU)*.

⁵ Foreign Intelligence Service – *Sluzhba vneshnej razvedki (SVR)*.

⁶ Choice of polonium in the Alexander Litvinenko's poisoning case in London in November 2006 is generally attributed to his violation of the assumed code of conduct of the FSB operative.

⁷ So called "vezdehod" – document giving right to enter any place, office, building, territory regardless their property or status, whether it is state, public or private.

⁸ As of December 2006.

⁹ Famous quotation from the Vladimir Putin's speech at the Chekist Day party at the FSB headquarters in December 1999 was: "I want to report to you that the mission of the group of FSB officers sent undercover to work at the [Russian] government is being accomplished successfully."

Parliament, Court system) as well as main business groups and most important mass-media outlets have been captured by the CSP. Since the members of the CSP have taken key positions in the most important institutions of the state, business groups, media channels, almost all valuable resources available in the society (political, executive, legal, judicial, enforcement, military, economic, financial, media) have been concentrated and in many cases monopolized in the hands of the CSP.

Mass media.

Independent mass media in Russia virtually does not exist. The TV channels, radio, printed media are heavily censored with government propaganda disseminating cult of power and violence, directed against democrats, liberals, westerners and the West itself, including and first of all the US. The level of the anti-US propaganda is incomparable even with one of the Soviet times in at least 1970-s and 1980s.

Electoral system.

Since 1999 there is no free, open, competitive parliamentary or presidential election in Russia. The last two elections – the parliamentary one in December 2007 and presidential one in March 2008 – have been conducted as special operations and been heavily rigged with at least 20 mln ballots in each case stuffed in favor of the regime candidates. None of the opposition political parties or opposition politicians has been allowed either to participate in the elections, or even to be registered at the Ministry of Justice. For comparison, the Belarusian regime that is considered to be “the last dictatorship in Europe” has allowed opposition politicians to participate in the parliamentary election last September.

Political opposition.

Members of political opposition in Russia are regularly being harassed, intimidated, beaten by the regime’s security forces. Each rally of the opposition since 2006 is been harshly attacked by the riot police, hundreds of people have been beaten, arrested and thrown into jails. In April 2007 the former world chess champion Garry Kasparov has been arrested and put into jail for 5 days as he was walking along the Tverskaya street in the downtown of Moscow. The same day there was an attempt to arrest the former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov.

Political prisoners.

According to the human rights organizations there are about 80 political prisoners in the country who are serving their terms for their views and political activities from 2 to 9 years in the jails and camps. One of the best known political prisoners is Mikhail Khodorkovsky who has been sentenced to 9 years in the Siberian camp Krasnokamensk on the basis of purely fabricated case against him and his oil company YUKOS. The company has been confiscated and taken by one of the leading figures of the current Chekist regime who is occupying now the position of the deputy prime minister of the Russian government. Mr. Khodorkovsky has recently been transported to Moscow to be put on another fabricated trial with a clear purpose to keep him behind the bars forever. Just for comparison, the Mr. Lukashenka’s political regime in the neighboring Belarus that is very far from any notion of genuine democracy, has nevertheless released the last four political prisoners in summer 2008. It is worth to note that until recently the EU had

the so called smart sanctions against Mr. Lukashenka and members of his government. As far as I know, the US still has similar sanctions against the Belarusian leadership, but not against the Russian one.

Terror.

The fate of some other people dealing with the regime is even worse.

Over the last ten years tens of thousands of people have been killed in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria.

In Autumn 1999 several hundred people died in the series of apartment bombings across the country – from Moscow to Buynaks in Dagestan. In the contrast to the claims from the FSB that those bombings have been organized by Chechens, the local militia was able to detain several people who tried to bomb the apartment block in the city of Ryazan. They turn out to be the agents of the FSB. Then the FSB has announced that there were “anti-terrorist exercises” with the goal to put explosives into the basement of the apartment building. After the story became widely known, the detained FSB agents have been freed by the order from Moscow and finally disappeared, while apartments’ bombings stopped unexpectedly as they started.

Since November 1998 several presidential hopefuls, politicians, journalists, lawyers who were either in opposition to or independent of the current political regime, have been directly assassinated or died in the very suspicious circumstances. Among them are the leader of the Democratic Russia party and the member of the parliament Galina Starovoitova, journalist and editor Artem Borovik, journalist and member of the Yabloko party Larisa Yudina, the governor of the Krasnoyarsk region general Alexander Lebed who came third in the 1999 presidential election, the leader of the Army Movement, member of the parliament general Lev Rokhlin, the leader of the Liberal party of Russia Sergei Yushenkov, one of the organizers of the Liberal party of Russia Vladimir Golovlev, journalist and one of the leaders of the Yabloko party, the member of the parliament Yuri Shekochikhin, ethnographer Nikolay Girenko, journalist and writer Anna Politkovskaya, journalist and military expert Ivan Safronov, the deputy head of the Central Bank of Russia Andrei Kozlov, the member of National Bolshevik party Yuri Chervochkin, journalist, editor and one of the leaders of the Ingush national movement Magomed Yevloyev, lawyer Stanislav Markelov, journalist Anastasia Baburova.

Since March 1999 the wave of political assassinations moved beyond the Russian border. In March 1999 Vyacheslav Chornovol, leader of the People’s Ruch and a candidate for the Ukrainian presidential election that autumn, died in the car accident near Kiev that has been identified by the Ukrainian security service as the assassination organized by FSB. In February 2004 Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, the former Chechen President, and his 15-year old son have been bombed in Doha by two officers with diplomatic passports from the Russian embassy in Qatar, Mr. Yandarbiev has died. In September 2004 Victor Yushenko, the presidential candidate in the Ukrainian presidential election in November 2004, has been poisoned and barely survived. In November 2006 the former FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko has been poisoned by polonium in the downtown of London and died.

Wars against other nations.

Since 2004 the Russian political regime embarked on a series of wars of different kinds against foreign nations. The list of wars waged in the last 5 years is not a short one:

Russian-Byelorussian Gas War 2004,
First Russian-Ukrainian Gas War, January 2006,
Russian-Georgian Energy Supply War, January 2006,
Russian-Georgian Wine and Mineral Water War, March-April 2006,
Russian-Georgian Spy War, September-October 2006,
Russian-Estonian Monuments and Cyber War, April-May 2007,
Russian-Georgian Conventional War, April-October 2008,
Russian-Azerbaijan Cyber War, August 2008,
Second Russian-Ukrainian Gas War, January 2009,
Anti-US full fledged Propaganda War, 2006-2009.

The Russian-Georgian War that started last year was under preparations by the Russian authorities at least since February 2003. This is one of the most serious international crises for at least last 30 years that constitutes one of the most worrisome developments of our days. This war has brought:

- a) The first massive use of the military forces by Russia beyond its borders since the Soviet Union's intervention against Afghanistan in 1978;
- b) The first intervention against an independent country in Europe since the Soviet Union's intervention against Czechoslovakia in 1968;
- c) The first intervention against an independent country in Europe that led to unilateral changes of the internationally recognized borders in Europe since the late 1930s and early 1940s. Particular similarities of these events with the events of the 1930s are especially troubling.

Uniqueness of the current political regime in Russia.

One of the most important characteristics of the current political regime in Russia is that the real political power in the country belongs neither to one person, nor family, nor military junta, nor party, nor ethnic group. The power belongs to the corporation of secret police operatives. The political system in which secret police plays an important role in the political system is not very special. *VChK-OGPU-NKVD-MGB-KGB* in the Communist USSR, *Gestapo* in Nazi Germany, *SAVAK* in the Shah's Iran had enormous powers in those tyrannical regimes. Yet, none of those secret police organizations did possess supreme power in the respective countries. In all previous historic cases secret police and its leaders have been subordinate to their political masters – whether they were Stalin, Hitler, or Pehlevi, regardless how monstrous they have been. The political regime in today's Russia is therefore quite unique, since so far there was probably no country in the world history (at least in the relatively developed part of the world in the XXth and the XXIst centuries) where a secret police organization did capture all political, administrative, military, economic, financial, and media powers.

It does not mean that all population of the country or even all staff of the government agencies do belong to the secret police. Many of them are professional and honest people who genuinely alien to the Chekist/Mafiosi structures. Nevertheless, it is not they who do have control over the state, and not they who are in charge of the key decisions in the country.

Forecast.

Even a brief look on the US-Russia relations over the last 10 years reveals quite a striking fact of the *permanent retreat* of the American side on almost all issues in the bilateral relations.

Ten years ago then the Clinton administration has expressed publicly and energetically its concern on violation of basic human rights in Chechnya. The Russian side has suggested to the partner not to intervene in the internal Russian issues. The US administration has finally followed the advice.

After that over the years the US administrations have expressed concerns, dissatisfaction, protests on number of issues: on destruction of freedom of mass media in Russia, on imprisonment of Mr. Khodorkovsky and takeover of Yukos, on destruction of the rule of law, electoral system, political opposition, NGOs, property rights, including not only of the Russian but also US companies (for example Exxon), on political assassinations, on aggressive behavior versus Russia's neighbors, finally on outright aggression of the Russian army against sovereign state and the UN member Georgia, that led to effective annexation of two Georgian territories Abkhazia and South Ossetia, creation of the Russian military bases and deployment of regular Russian forces over there.

In all those cases the Russian side has suggested the US *to shut up*, and in all those cases the American side followed this advice sooner or later. There were no sanctions whatsoever for any behavior of the Russian authorities.

Recently the US has even resumed the NATO-Russia cooperation in less than 6 months after the Russian aggression against Georgia, after the rudest violation of the international law and order, the UN Charter and the UN Resolution #3314 of December 14, 1974.

The recent suggestion "to reset the button" in the US-Russia relations and "to start the relations with the blank list" is met with poorly hid joy and satisfaction on a part of the Russian Chekists. For them it means achievement of many goals that they dreamt of. This "the so called *Munich statement*" is interpreted by them as a de-facto acceptance by the current US administration of the idea that has been put forward by the Russian leadership last summer – the idea of the de-facto restoration of the Russian Chekists' (secret police) influence and power over the post-Soviet space under the title of having the areas with the so called *privileged interests*. This idea is already being under hasty implementation with the creation of the \$10 bn fund and substantial Russian credits given to Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Ukraine, recent agreement of creation of joint fast reaction troops of 7 nations of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, establishing substantial financial and personal control over mass media in the FSU countries, permanent attempts to change the political regime and western orientation of Ukraine and finishing the conquest of Georgia.

Policy of the proclaimed "cooperation", "movement from competition to collaboration", "improvement of relations" with the current political regime in Russia has very clear consequences. Such type of behavior on the part of the US administration can not be called even a *retreat*. It is not even an *appeasement policy* that is so well known to all of us by *another Munich decision* in 1938. It is a *surrender*. It is a full, absolute and unconditional surrender to the regime of the secret police officers, chekists and Mafiosi

bandits in today's Russia. It is a surrender of the hopes and efforts of the Russian democrats as well as peoples of the post-Soviet states who dreamed to get out of the system that controlled and tortured them for almost a century – back to the Chekists' power. But it is even more. It is a clear manifestation to all democratic and liberal forces in Russia and in other post-Soviet states that on all internal and external issues of their struggle against forces of the past the United States now abandons them and takes the position of their deadly adversaries and enemies. And therefore it is an open invitation for new adventures of the Russian Chekists' regime in the post-Soviet space and at some points beyond it.

The very term for such type of policy has not been chosen by me, it is borrowed from the title of this hearing, namely, *collaboration*. Therefore the term chosen for the agents of the US administration's policy in the coming era is "*collaborationists*". Collaboration between two governments today could be only on the Russian regime's terms and for fulfillment of the Russian government's goals. From the European history of the XX century we know what means if a revisionist power has a clear-cut goal to restore influence and control over its neighbors while other powers chose not to defend victims of the attacks, but instead try to collaborate with an aggressor.

We know the consequences of the collaborationist policy – those who retreat and surrender will get not peace, but war, war with unpredictable and nasty results. It might be also not a one war.

When the world will get there, we need to remember that we had a warning.

Thank you.